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ABSTRACT

Beginning with a review of the purpose of social studies education and the major responsibilities of teachers, this paper goes on to discuss various approaches to citizenship education, including the verbalizing of perceived values at the elementary and secondary levels; the study of persistent social, economic, and political problems; the acquisition of decision-making skills; and the participation and direct involvement of students in community and school projects. An overview of such current educational issues as declining enrollments, "back to basics" emphasis, discipline and related problems, lack of preparation time for teachers, the need for continuing education, resource support, recognition for teachers, and the need for creative and productive leadership in schools is presented. The topic of improving social studies instruction is discussed from the standpoints of teaching strategies, learning activities, and experience. Guidelines for selecting appropriate learning activities, instructional objectives for the social studies (attitude objectives, knowledge objectives, and skills objectives), curriculum development, and instructional methodology (scope and sequence, curriculum guides, inquiry based instruction, question types, and questioning techniques) are outlined. (SY)

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IMPROVING TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES CLASSROOM

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IMPROVING TEACHING AND LEARNING

IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES CLASSROOM

Purpose of Social Studies Education

A major question confronting schools is how to provide an education that not only will meet each student's personal needs, but also will include the study of problematic areas of our society and the perpetuation of democratic values. There is consensus that students should be prepared to assume active roles as intelligent citizens and decision-makers in a free, just and democratic society. Therefore, instruction should be provided which enables students to become self-reliant and independent, to think and reason logically and sensibly, and to be able to make just and rational decisions. Students ought to be encouraged to achieve their maximum potentialities. Furthermore, students should be developing insights with respect to the basic premises of our democratic society. They should, consequently, aim to acquire those skills which will help them participate effectively in society as worthwhile citizens (Parker and Jarolimek, pp. 5-11).

Concern is often expressed by the American public that

schools are not adequately preparing students to deal intelligently with the complexities of a changing world. It appears that too few of our students seem able to cope with personal and societal problems, and they assume either passive or nihilistic roles rather than active and responsible roles in society (Hepburn and Radz, pp. 1-4).

Major Responsiblities of Teachers

The major responsibilities of teachers include the tasks of providing positive learning experiences for students within their classrooms, of encouraging students to take advantage of learning opportunities beyond the classroom, and of performing effectively in their roles as teachers. Students, if they are well taught, will want to learn and to perform at their maximum level of achievement. In searching for meaning and understanding in their lives, students ought to be able to adapt to a continuously changing environment and to develop and/or acquire values appropriate for a democratic society. Opportunities ought to be provided for students to apply what they have learned to ordinary and unique situations. Moreover, effective learning activities should help students identify acceptable patterns of relationships among people and to understand how attitudes, values, beliefs, ideas, and feelings affect their own behavior and how people relate to each other.

Approaches to Citizenship Education

At the elementary level, one approach to citizenship education requires that children verbalize the core values believed to be common to all Americans, and in so doing, experience a sense of identification with our society and the values presumed to be unique to our society (Oliver, pp. 201-213). For example, some who favor this approach believe that children should be taught that George Washington, Andrew Jackson, and Abraham Lincoln were outstanding leaders of our country. These men would be accepted as heroes and emulated for their courage and achievements. Thus, children would identify with the shared traditions of our American society.

At the secondary level, another approach focuses on the study of persistent social, economic, and political problems in our society at all levels of government (Oliver, pp. 201-227). Proponents of this approach contend that the problems studied should not only be current, but also significant and that students should regard them as worthwhile for consideration. Some examples of appropriate types of problems to study would include: poverty, education, equality of opportunities, human rights, and crime. The major reason advanced for studying persistent problems is that, by so doing, students would develop an understanding and concern for those critical issues which affect their personal and societal freedoms. This approach, it is thought, would provide students with opportunities to develop skills for

investigating and learning about the core values of our society and the larger global community.

Another approach emphasizes the importance of students acquiring decision-making skills. A citizen in our society is constantly confronted with questions such as "How can I make a wise decision?" It is suggested, by those advocating this approach, that experiences should be provided which would enable students to become involved in experiences which would help them develop critical thinking skills such as defining a problem, gathering and analyzing data, hypothesizing, evaluating the process, and making wise decisions (Cassidy and Kurfman, pp. 20-24).

Still another approach focuses on participation and direct involvement of students. Students are moved into the community (Parker and Jarolimek, pp. 13-21). There, they may volunteer their services to social agencies, organizations and needy neighbors and citizens; observe the social, economic, and political processes; conduct surveys on the needs and problems of the community; participate in elections, attend political meetings, and/or work with elected officials; organize campaigns and work crews to help solve local problems; serve an internship with mayors, lawyers, and community workers; and other comparable activities and projects.

The participation in the community and school projects should be integrated and coordinated with significant knowledge and skills taught in the classroom; this process

should be occurring simultaneously as the students are observing the decision-making of others and exercising their decision-making skills in the community.

These activities and projects provide students with opportunties to apply what they have learned in the classroom to actual situations within the community.

Futhermore, approaches through the various disciplines in the social sciences, projects such as law-related education, and Lawrence Kohlberg's work on moral development can provide other endeavors to improve the quality of citizenship education in the schools.

These approaches are not distinct and separable. Some basic ideas are common to all. Therefore, instructional programs may embrace a numbe of approaches to meet particular needs and objectives.

Present State of Affairs: Students, Teachers and Schools

Today's students are different than students during the Sixties and Seventies. They are confronted with innumerable problems such as changing family roles, divorced parents, separated families, drugs, unemployment, depression, inflation, and rising costs of education. Teachers, too, are faced with innumerable problems such as discipline, physical safety, job security, and conflicting opinions as to what should be taught and how.

It is evident that too many schools in our society are

confronted with problems such as declining enrollments, lack of community support, and lack of creative and productive leadership.

Declining Enrollments and "Back to the Basics" Emphasis

Because of declining enrollments, schools are often closed in spite of community resistance. The high cost of utilities, maintenance, and personnel makes it prohibitive to continue offering programs in schools with limited student populations. The effect upon teachers is demoralizing. Often teachers are reassigned on the basis of "seniority: and feel ill-prepared and insecure in accepting teaching assignments in content areas they are inadequately prepared to teach. This results in strained relationships among staff members. In a few shool districts, efforts are made to help prepare teachers for their new assignments. However, in many cases, the teachers too often rely heavily upon a single textbook, trying to keep one lesson ahead of the students.

At the elementary level, frequently, little instruction is provided in social studies and more time is allocated for instruction in reading and mathematics because of community pressure and/or competency level testing in only these two areas. The secondary teacher, possibly unaware of the major responsibility of social studies for the development of democratic citizenship or lacking expertise in providing instruction in an interesting and productive manner for the

students, assigns the reading of one chapter after another in a rather boring and unenthusiastic manner (Goodlad, pp. 210-13).

Disciplinary and Other Related Problems

Some parents and other citizens may feel that the schools are not "properly educating" and disciplining students. Taxpayers, furthermore, may feel that teachers can and should do a better job of teaching. In such instances, they may regard schools as unsafe places for their children since teachers and administrators appear to be confronted with insurmountable disciplinary problems. Drugs, alcohol, knives, and even guns are a part of the culture of many schools. Racial tensions, gangs, habitual truancy, and sexual harassment are additional problems which confront schools. The community may feel that schools have failed since these problems exist.

According to some parents, if teachers and administrators were "dedicated" and committed to teaching children and young people, most of these problems could be eliminated. At the same time, some teachers think that parents are uncooperative and do not assume their share of responsibility in disciplining their children (Boyer, p. 142). There is agreement in both groups, however, that children are difficult to manage which may, in part, be due to changing cultural norms and values.

Lack of Preparation Time for Teachers

Teaching is very demanding; it is not easy. Often teachers are not given adequate preparation and planning time to develop and organize lessons which would insure optimum learning in the classroom. Elementary teachers have the responsibility for teaching not only social studies but classes in all content areas. Generally, their schedule includes less than one hour a day for preparation. During this limited amount of time, it is impossible to develop curriculum materials; plan lessons, work with students, meet with parents and other teachers; correct papers; and perform the myriad of tasks required.

Secondary teachers are confronted with some of the same problems plus additonal ones such as not enough time for adequate preparation and planning for at least two or more different content courses (Boyer, pp. 143-45).

Need for Continuing Education, Resources and Support

Teachers should have time to plan thoroughly and participate in worthwhile continuing education programs if they are to help students learn and if they are to change classrooms into more effective learning environments. Teachers should be provided with basic and supplemental materials and human resources to aid them in doing their best

for students. Also, teachers should utilize the home and the community environments within their instructional plans. Many types of resources may be used to create more effective classroom instruction. Only then will teachers not rely on a single textbook and avoid the use of teaching approaches which emphasize very insignificant learnings (Boyer, pp. 178-79).

Need for Recognition and Support

Teachers should be recognized and supported for outstanding performances in the classroom. Many excellent teachers feel that no one really appreciates their efforts in the classroom which includes excessive demands on their time for additional preparation and planning.

Need for Creative and Productive Leadership

If teachers need help in improving their classroom behavior, the administration and community should provide the necessary programs for professional development. These programs should be planned and organized together with teachers nd administrators in an atmosphere of mutual respect and commitment to the improvement of teaching.

These problems exist; they cannot be ignored. In spite of the difficulties in the schools, some efforts can be made to improve the quality of education. Successful instruction

is most likely to occur in an environment which takes into consideration the realities of existing problems and difficulties.

Improving Social Studies Instruction

If social studies instruction is to improve within schools, teachers should develop and/or select and use appropriate and effective teaching strategies and learning activities.

Teaching Strategies

Teaching strategies are generally procedures that teachers may use to help students achieve stated objectives. Learning activities, on the other hand, emphasize the role of students -- what they do, how they do it, and why they do it.

John U. Michaelis has developed an effective teaching strategy for comparing and contrasting (Michaelis, pp. 195-96). The purpose of this strategy is to help students clarify what is to be compared, then to identify the similarities and differences, and finally to summarize the similarities and differences. The three components of this strategy are: procedures, focusing questions, and illustrative applications. The first procedure involves the clarification of what is to be compared, that is, identifying comparable features. The focusing questions may be: What

did you see? What did you read? What features did you notice? An illustrative application of this strategy may be a study of the urban problems in two cities. The next procedure deals with identification of the similarities and differences. How are they alike? How are they different? The application may involve the continued study of urban problems in two cities. Which urban problems do both have? What special problems does each one have? The final procedure summarizes the similarities and differences, using focusing questions such as: What are the major likenesses? What are the major differences? Finally, in applying the information, the students can summarize how the two cities are similar and how they differ.

Learning Activities or Experiences

Numerous learning actyivities have been developed for teacher use. Teachers have also developed many learning activities for use in their classrooms. Basically, learning experiences are designed to involve students in thinking about and using content. Making a graph depiciting the rate of immigration from the 1800's to the present day; studying the various routes taken by the early pioneers who settled in the Northwest Territory; investigating and comparing the political platforms for the candidates running for President of the United States; participating in a simulation experience involving an international dispute; taking a trip

to the county court, local museum or art institute; writing a poem about peace; studying about the role of women in industry; participating in a play about freedom of the press; and many other similar activities are examples of learning experiences.

Using a variety of learning activities can be one of the teacher's most effective tools in trying to combat learner apathy in the classroom. It appears that a different or unique approach to learning, at least temporarily, can create greater responsiveness on the part of the learners and they will generally react with more energy, enthusiasm and resourcefulness. Using different activities should be determined, however, not solely because of their novelty but because the activities will be effective vehicles for the realization of teacher and learner goals.

Selelction of Appropriate Learning Activities

There is no one way of teaching that will be effective for all students. Certain types of learning activities may work well with particular students and some learning activities may not work well. Teachers have different teaching styles and students have different learning styles. The decision to use particular learning activities is generally dependent upon the teacher's academic and professional backgrounds; his/her willingness to experiment in using different methodology, strategies and techniques;

and his/her support from colleagues, administrators, parents and others in the community. Also, the decision should be based upon the needs, interests, and abilities of the students and the instructional objectives to be satisfied. In detemining which learning activities are most appropriate, these factors should be seriously considered in planning classroom experiences. Only then will the learning activities have meanings and provide insights for both teachers and students.

Guidelines for Selecting Appropriate Learning Activities

It is important that the learning activities provide an opportunity for the learners to practice the kind of behaviors implied by the stated objectives. Furthermore, the learning experiences should be within the range of possibility for the students involved and appropriate to their interests, needs, and capabilities. It should also be noted that there are a number of learning activities that can be used to attain the same instructional objectives and that the same learning activity may satisfy several instructional objectives.

Instructional Objectives for Social Studies

Social studies instructional objectives help teachers identify the kinds of behaviors they should expect of

students and, at the same time, the content the students are expected to learn. The instructional objectives are classified in three categories: attitudes, knowledge, and skills.

Attitude Objectives

Attitude objectives are extremely important in social studies instruction. Such objectives are those associated with feelings, interests, beliefs, and values. Learners cannot be forced to accept a particular attitude and/or value. Only when students have developed new insights, deeper understandings, and satisfaction in a given situation may there possibly occur changes in beliefs, attitudes, and values. It is hoped that the attitude learning activities will help students develop those insights, understandings, and satisfactions that lead to "just relations among people and institutions."

A commitment to core democratic values should be obvious in the behavior of teachers, the atmosphere in the classroom, and the social studies curricula. Social studies instruction cannot focus on attitudes and values in a vacuum. Students will learn to value love and justice to the degree that they are being loved and treated justly.

Knowledge Objectives

The knowledge objectives deal with the acquisition and understanding of information. It is, however, more than merely recalling or remembering facts. It is knowledge which helps learners develop understandings and insights. Students should have opportunities to apply what they have learned to new situations, synthesize information to form new and creative ideas, and to make judgments about the value of knowledge for a specific situation or purpose. The knowledge acquired should be functional and contribute to the development of significant and relevant understandings and insights, values, and skills which will foster good citizenship. Knowledge should not be valued as an end in itself. That is, information is important as a part of the total process involved in thinking and problem solving.

Teaching in the social studies should be concerned with instruction which leads to a high degree of learner involvement in the learning process. Value conflicts are a recognized characteristic of our society; students should develop skills in coping with conflicts. The diversity of our people, in terms of origin and beliefs, has promoted competing political, economic, and social viewpoints. Diversities also exist because of age and sex. Conflicts and incompatibilities which arise should be exposed and opened to rational study and resolution.

Skill Objectives

The final classification of objectives deals with skills: gathering, analyzing, synthesizing, and presenting information skills; socialization skills, and decision-making skills. To think, students should use their reasoning power not only to examine and interpret informaion, but also to analyze, organize, synthesize, and apply knowledge logically and creatively in a variety of settings. Young people need to be involved in problem solving situations.

Curriculum Development and Instructional Methodology

Curriculum directors, administrators, professional staff development coordinators, teachers, and students will need to work cooperatively to implement instructional materials and learning activities as a part of their own curriculum and instructional program development process. It should be necessary for local school districts to consider how to proceed in reviewing and revising their social studies programs. This will include resolving questions related to developing and/or revising their district's K - 12 philosophy for social studies education; reaching consensus as to scope and sequence matters; developing and/or updating curriculum guides; selecting approrpiate instructional materials; planning and organizing needed continuing education programs for teachers; and evaluating existing programs.

Scope and Sequence

Research in learning has revealed findings which can contribute to more effective teaching and greater learning although sometimes the results of such research are ignored and set aside by teachers and curriculum designers. It does take thorough planning and courage on the part of teachers and curriculum planners to be selective as to what content to teach and how to organize that content. Everything ccannot be taught nor covered. Therefore, that which is selected should be significant and appropriate.

A number of scope and sequence programs have been devised. One design was formulated by the late Hilda Taba during the early 1960's as she worked with teachers in Contra Costa, California (Taba and Hills, pp. 1-28). Taba's "spiral of concept development" stresses a scope and sequence program which includes concepts such as cultural change, cooperation, and interdependence as organizing elements or threads interwoven throughout the curriculum from the first grade level through the sixth grade level. Furthermore, those organizing elements are developed from the simple to the complex, from the general to the specific, and from the concrete to the abstract.

At the first level, "Family Members -- Structure and Roles and Family," the concepts are developed at the simple, general and concrete levels as outlined by Jean Piaget in his theories on the growth and intellectual development of children. At the 6th grade level the same concepts are

greatly elaborated -- much more complex, specific and abstract -- than at the first five levels. Again, the social and intellectual maturation of the students should be seriously considered as learning activities and experiences are selected.

The National Council for the Social Studies Task Force on Scope and Sequence for Social Studies has presented a preliminary position statement for analysis and discussion which describes a prograam for K - 12 with four optional sequences for grades 6 - 12 (Report of the NCSS Task Force on Scope and Sequence, pp. 249-264). The scope and sequence statement acknowledges citizenship education as the major purpose of the social studies and is concerned about the development of knowledge, skills, and democratic beliefs and values.

The suggested "grade level examples" for kindergarten through the 12th grade are as follows (Report of the NCSS Task Force on Scope and Sequence, pp. 254-56):

Kindergarten -- Awareness of Self in a Social Setting

Grade 1 -- The Individual in Primary Social Groups: Understanding School and Family Life

Grade 2 -- Meeting Basic Needs in Nearby Social Groups: The Neighborhood

Grade 3 -- Sharing Earth-Space with Others: The Community

Grade 4 -- Human Life in Varied Environments: The Region

Grade 5 -- People of the Americas: The United States and its Close Neighbors

Grade 6 -- People and Cultures: The Eastern Hemisphere

Grade 7 -- A Changing World of Many Nations: A Global View

Grade 8 -- Building a Strong and Free Nation: The United States

Grade 9 -- Systems that Make a Democratic Society Work: Law, Justice, and Economics

Grade 10 -- Origins of Major Cultures: A World History

Grade 11 -- The Maturing of America: United States History

Grade 12 -- One-year course or courses required; selection(s) to be made from the following:

Issues and Problems of Modern Society

Introduction to the Social Sciences

The Arts in Human Societies

International Area Studies

Social Science Elective Courses:

Anthropology, Economics, Government, Psychology, Sociology

Supervised Experience in Community Affairs

Local Options

Even though the content organization appears to reinforce a more "traditional" approach to teaching United States history; nevertheless, the document should be discussed, analyzed, and modified to meet individual school

needs. This, in itself, may be one other way in which improvement in social studies education may be accomplished in the schools.

The Task Force has presented the document as a "preliminary" statement; perhaps a more innovative, definitive, and bold statement will eventually result from their initial work.

Curriculum Guides

Curriculum guides, courses of studdy, lists of suggested topics, and/or textbooks generally determine units of work to be studied in social studies classrooms. Some experienced teachers develop and use curriculum guides for more effective teaching. The content for study and the learning activities in the curriculum guide are presented in an orderly manner, for an in-depth study of relevant concepts and generalizations. The course of study is a general statement, approved, generally, by a board of education, which contains the philosophy of the school district, the educational goals and instructional objectives, and the prescribed content to be taught.

The curriculum guide is designed to help with the development of a total learning experience for students which extends over a semester or a full year. Organized, careful thinking and planning is necessary for productive teaching and leaning. The curriculum guide is actually a plan made up

of a number of teaching units for class work. It should, furthermore, reflect recent developments and trends in social studies education such as the interdisciplinary approach, inquiry-based instruction, presentation of a model for in-depth study, use of multi-media, use of simulations and games, and role-playing activities.

The major components of the curriculum guide are: content and the organizaiton of that content: concepts and generalizations; attitude, knowledge, and skill objectives; initiatory, developmental, and culminating (evaluative) learning activities; and an annotated bibliography of resources for teachers and students. The "why" and "how" of teaching should be implicit in the guide. The components, as they are developed, should be interconnected and consistent with district and school goals and objectives, and the prescribed course of study.

In implementing the curriculum guide, teachers should present the learning process in understandable terms to the students. The students should constantly be aware of the educational goals and instructional objectives of the experiences, the "why" of what they are doing and the "how" they are accomplishing the objectives. The learning experiences ought to be congruent with well-planned and organized objectives, content, and concepts and generalizations.

Inquiry-Based Instruction

It is recommended in current professional literature that inquiry-based instruction should influence curriculum developers in determining how to present content within the classroom. Student involvement and interaction with the content are important aspects in inquiry-based instruction. Content, however, should not be an end in itself. Students should be encouraged to use the same intellectual operations of thinking that they would use if they were involved in problem solving. The learners should be provided with opportunities to interact with the content for the purpose of acquiring meaningful knowledge, values, and skills. Since another characteristic of this strategy involves students finding out for themselves (discovery), the process is more time consuming in the clssroom than the "telling" teaching technique which is better suited for "covering and sometimes burying larger amounts of content in shorter amounts of time."

Teaching students to think critically takes time. Of course, it takes less time to plan lessons which involve telling students that they are either right or wrong and then to present reasons for the correct answer. However, the latter type of teaching does not promote critical thinking, independence of thought, nor the development of significant insights by students. Moreover, classrooms under these circumstances become boring and uninteresting for students.

Types of Questions and Questioning Techniques

An important aspect of inquiry-based instruction relates to the types of questions used by teachers. The effectiveness of learning activities is dependent upon the thoroughness of planning and upon the quality and nature of the questions which are asked by the teachers and the students.

Questions asked to promote convergent thinking are different from those which promote divergent thinking. Divergent types of questions are those which emphasize the search for many possible solutions, thinking in different and novel directions, and the ability to go off in unique directions of thought. Divergent types of questions are those for which there is no single answer, whereas, in convergent questioning there is a short answer or yes/no response.

Questions may also encourage intuitive type thinking, that is, thinking which is based on guessing, making hunches, and even jumping to conclusions. Other types of questions can lead to inductive and deductive reasoning. To develop inductive thinking, students should have opportunities through questioning, to generalize from a series of specific data. Social studies generalizations may be developed effectively through inductive reasoning. Deductive thinking involves reasoning from a given set of premises to the specific or from general overall assertions to a logical

conclusion.

An example of a question leading to convergent thinking is: "What are the provisions of the Social Security Act?" A question emphasizing divergent thinking is "What is the best way to finance public schools?" Students are encouraged to make inferences and generalizations. There are many possible answers to divergent type questions.

Questions can be classified in a number of ways. Most of the classifications are based on Benjamin W. Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: Handbook I, The Cognitive Domain (Bloom, et al., pp. 201-07). The first and lowest level of th taxonomy is knowledge, then follows comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and the last and highest level, evaluation.

An example for each classification is:

1) Knowledge: Who was the first governor of Michigan?
2) Comprehension: What were the effects of the Tennessee Valley Authority project on the economy of that area?
3) Application: What are some possible ways to diversify Michigan's economy?
4) Analysis: Why did Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin gain much power during the early 1950's?
5) Synthesis: What are some reasons for the economic problems during the 1980's?
6) Evaluation: Should compulsory school attendance be eliminated in the public schools?

Lower level questions or questions which ask students to recall information or to describe data are often overused in the classroom. Higher level types of questions such as explanatory, synthesizing, valuing, and open-ended ones should be used more often by teachers.

Different types of questions are suited for different purposes, depending upon objectives. Questions should involve students with various significant processes in reasoning, from the simple to the complex. Student questions and teacher questions, of course, should be based upon the stated goals and objectives.

Summary

If students are to consider persistent problems, if they are to empathize and to feel deeply about people who are denied human rights and equality of opportunity, and if they are to make wise and just decisions in social, political, and economic areas, teachers need to provide, continuously, instruction that is important, relevant, and interesting to students. Consideration of the various aspects of teaching and learning should help students and teachers reach these goals.

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